



Lake Mac offering whopper walleyes

By Daryl Bauer

Nebraska fishery biologists found an exceptional population of big walleyes in Lake McConaughy in the fall of 2009, and 2010 has the potential to be an excellent year for McConaughy walleye anglers.

Nebraska’s largest reservoir always has produced big walleyes, and is the home of the 16-pound, 2-ounce state record caught in 1971. In the late 1980s, alewives, a cool-water, open-water bait fish, became established in McConaughy. Since then the reservoir has had even better potential to produce big walleyes. Alewife-fed walleyes grow relatively fast and are heavy, fat fish.

Over the years, walleye production in

McConaughy has been influenced by water levels. Large year-classes of walleyes usually are produced when water levels are high. There have been low water levels at McConaughy in recent years, but there was good production of walleyes in the years before the recent drought. Now, those fish have had enough time to grow big and fat, resulting in an abundance of walleyes larger than 25 inches in McConaughy.

However, just because the fish are there is no guarantee they will bite. Fishing conditions may be particularly challenging on McConaughy as rising water levels flood a jungle of terrestrial vegetation that grew on the exposed lake bottom during low

water conditions. Flooded vegetation will provide great habitat for walleyes and a variety of other aquatic creatures, including an abundance of prey. Rising water levels in any body of water usually results in fish moving toward the shallows and into flooded habitat where they may be harder to find. Combine that with walleyes that likely will be well-fed and those fish could be difficult to catch.

That does not mean that big McConaughy walleyes will be impossible to catch in 2010, but anglers might have to work to catch them. Anglers should always pay attention to prey the walleyes are eating, especially alewives in Lake McConaughy.

See Walleye, Page 3

Drawdowns affect fishing, access at 2 western lakes

By Eric Fowler

The discovery of structural problems with dams at two southwestern Nebraska reservoirs required drastic drawdowns for repairs last fall, affecting fisheries and access for boaters.

Repair work was expected to be complete at Lake Maloney near North Platte by April 1, and the reservoir was expected to refill by May. Work isn’t expected to begin until at least 2011 at Red Willow Dam near McCook, however, and Red Willow Reservoir (also known as Hugh Butler Lake) will remain at its current low level until repairs are complete.

Routine maintenance work at Lake Maloney last July revealed displacement of the toe wall, which supports concrete wave breakers that cover and protect the dam. Repairs required the lake’s level to be lowered 14 feet in October, exposing much of the lakebed and leaving a maximum water depth of 10 feet.

Darrol Eichner, who manages southwestern Nebraska’s fisheries for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission,

See Drawdowns, Page 6

Catch of the Day: Carp-O-Rama



An angler gets some help landing a carp from the bank at Pawnee Lake during the 2009 Carp-O-Rama. The annual event brings out anglers who want to learn how to catch, clean and prepare carp. Experts, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologists and volunteers help put on this can’t-miss family event, which will be held on June 26 this year. For a list of other can’t-miss summer events, see page 4.



Morel mushroom hunting is a favorite activity for many Nebraskans and an excellent opportunity to get children outdoors.

Hunting morels, shed antlers a spring ritual

By Katie Stacey and Greg Wagner

Springtime in Nebraska is a great time to enjoy nature. Two popular ways to spend time outdoors with family and friends in spring are morel mushroom and shed deer antler hunting.

Morels begin to appear in mid- to late-April, and by that time deer will have shed their antlers. Combining both woodland hunts can lead to a unique outdoor experience, the ultimate natural scavenger hunt.

Shed antler hunting is a wonderful way to get an idea of what bucks are frequenting your hunting woods. Shed antlers can be used to make many crafts,

such as knife handles, lamps or picture frames, and some people just like to collect them. Here are some likely places to find shed antlers:

- Along well-used deer trails, especially those leading from bedding areas to feeding areas.
- Bedding areas
- Deer fence/stream crossings

Morels are not only delicious to eat, they are easy to find. Following a few simple pointers, you will have a bucketful in no time.

- Go early, go often. When the lilacs and violets

See Morels, Page 6

Hatching a Plan

Nebraska hatcheries produce Master Anglers, state-record fish for all anglers to enjoy

By Daryl Bauer

Have you ever admired a fish you just caught and imagined the life story it could tell? Depending on the species of fish, and the water in which it lived, that story could include some time inside one of Nebraska’s five fish hatcheries.

In the Beginning

All fish begin as eggs, including those cultured inside a hatchery. For species such as walleyes and northern pike, for example, fisheries workers gather eggs and sperm from the fish right after ice out. This may be done by gently forcing the eggs from a “ripe” female that is ready to deposit her eggs. Those eggs are deposited into a pan, and then the milt or sperm from male fish are placed in the pan. Stirring with a wing feather from a turkey or goose is done to thoroughly mix the eggs and sperm.

This “pan-spawning” often is done in the absence of water. Fish sperm are inactive until contacting water; by using the “dry-spawning” method, eggs and sperm are mixed to maximize contact before the sperm are activated. This ensures that the greatest number of eggs will be fertilized.

Depending on the species of fish, the eggs may be adhesive and will clump together. Clumping can cause problems as the eggs are cultured because circulation of water around the eggs is impeded and fungus is more likely to develop on the eggs. To avoid clumping, fish culturists will add a slurry of fuller’s earth to the eggs



Newly hatched walleye fry will be transferred to outdoor rearing ponds, where they will grow to fingerling size.

after fertilization, and the fine particles that coat the eggs then prevent clumping.

Eggs often are transported back to a hatchery in buckets or coolers filled with water from which the parent fish were taken. Once they arrive, the eggs are placed in hatching jars or trays. Water is circulated through the eggs while they are incubated. Eggs are inspected daily, and dead eggs are picked off to avoid fungus problems. If fungus begins to develop, chemical treatments can control the fungus and reduce the loss of

eggs.

Incubation time varies from species to species and is influenced by water temperature. Warmer temperatures speed development of the eggs. Culturists often manipulate water temperatures so eggs hatch at the desired time for stocking into hatchery ponds or destination waters. Hatching may take as long as a couple of weeks.

Recently hatched fish are called fry. Fry can be so small that they are barely visible to the naked eye and look like little flecks of pepper with tails. Eyes and yolk sacs may be visible on newly-hatched fry while the rest of the body is transparent.

Stocking Fry

Some fish species are stocked into Nebraska waters as fry that are only a few days old. Mortality rates of stocked fry are extremely high, but incredible numbers of fry can be stocked. For example, 4-day old walleye fry are usually stocked at rates of 1,000 fry per acre of water. If only a small percentage of fry survive to adulthood, there will be an abundance of fish

for anglers to catch.

Other stocking strategies require larger fish that are grown in a hatchery or rearing station. Fry can be stocked in hatchery ponds where they will eat naturally-occurring zooplankton and aquatic insects and grow to fingerling size. Or, the fry may be held in troughs, raceways or tanks where they are trained to eat artificial feed. Fish that are raised in hatchery ponds are usually there for only a few weeks until they eat themselves out of house and home. At that time, they will be fingerlings and may be stocked or raised even larger.

Making Bigger Fish

Rearing fish to advanced fingerling or catchable sizes requires much more hatchery space and food. To produce larger fish, fingerlings are taken from ponds and then divided into smaller lots that are stocked back in multiple hatchery ponds. Some species, such as channel catfish, may be raised to larger sizes on artificial feed while species, such as muskellunge, require minnows and other small fish that have been raised in hatchery ponds or are added to the hatchery ponds. The longer fish are held in a hatchery to grow to larger sizes the greater the investment of time, hatchery space and money. Catchable-size rainbow trout cost approximately \$1.50 a piece to produce while 10-14-inch muskellunge stocked in Nebraska waters cost as much as \$13 each.

Hatchery production of other species is less intensive. Black bass, sunfish species and crappie can be produced by introducing a few paired adults into a hatchery pond and letting them “do their own thing.” After those fish produce fry as many adult fish as possible are removed from the ponds and rearing proceeds as has been described earlier.

Nebraska fisheries workers gladly produce the fish needed for stocking and may provide you with your next Master Angler catch.

Daryl Bauer is the fisheries outreach program manager with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



Eggs are gently forced from a “ripe” female fish and collected in a pan. Sperm from male fish is added in a process known as “pan-spawning.”



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Kayaks give anglers additional option

These stealthy, small craft can put anglers right on top of fish

By Daryl Bauer

When most people hear the word “kayak” they think of a small boat that looks something like a canoe; a paddler sitting inside a cockpit, using a double-bladed paddle to run rapids on some river and then performing an Eskimo roll to right himself after tipping.

Not many would think of fishing out of a kayak. But that is changing with new molded-plastic kayaks where boaters sit on top of the kayak instead of in a cockpit. These kayaks are relatively stable and seldom tip, and anglers have discovered that the sit-on-top kayaks are great fishing vessels.

A number of companies make sit-on-top kayaks. Shop around and you will find they come in a variety of sizes, styles and colors and offer a variety of features. All of them are light, stable, durable, and relatively inexpensive.

At first glance, these kayaks do not seem roomy. Many have storage



ERIC FOWLER

Fishing from a kayak can put anglers where the fish are located without attracting their attention, resulting in a nice catch.

molded into the kayak where gear may be stowed in and on the craft. Anglers customize their kayaks by adding tackle boxes, coolers, rod holders, anchor systems, and even depth-finders and GPS units. A kayak is small enough and light enough that it can be transported by almost any car or pickup and can be launched anywhere.

A fishing kayak can be an inexpensive way for an angler to get offshore to fish, and there are some situations where a fishing kayak will

out-perform a fully tricked-out fishing boat. Because anglers sit just above the water in a sit-on-top kayak, they can quietly approach spooky fish. Also, their small size and shallow draft allows fishing kayaks to go where no one else can go. Float tube anglers can realize many of the same stealth and access advantages offered by a kayak, but the kayak can cover more water.

Anglers in any boat should know the capabilities of their craft, keep an eye on the weather and water conditions and always have the proper

Kayak Advantages

- Less expensive than boat
- Approach spooky fish quietly
- Cover more water than float tube
- Go where other craft cannot
- Lighter than a canoe
- Easy to launch

gear. This may be especially true for those fishing from a kayak, but do not think that a fishing kayak is limited to small waters or small fish. There are kayak anglers fishing salt water and large inland waters, even venturing off-shore to catch unbelievably big fish such as sharks, marlin, halibut, and salmon. Cold waters may be fished by donning waders or dry suits.

A fishing kayak could be used to catch anything that swims in Nebraska waters. If you try one, chances are you will love the quiet, solitude, exercise, and big fish that can be caught, and you likely will become hooked.

Daryl Bauer is the fisheries outreach program manager with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

New program will improve access for bank anglers

By Jerry Kane

No boat from which to fish? No problem. A Nebraska Game and Parks Commission program has been created to provide better fishing access for bank anglers. The Angler Access Program will use a number of methods to improve bank fishing at sites across the state.

Bank fishing provides fun for all age groups and experience levels of angling. Successful bank fishing requires good access to aquatic habitat and water depths that attract sport fish. Convenient access to quality fishing areas is an important part of the angling experience and is key for recruiting young anglers, new adults and lapsed anglers.

The program, started in 2010, is funded by revenue generated from the \$2.50 increase in the price of the aquatic habitat stamp.

Among the methods to be used to improve bank access through this program are:

- building fishing piers, where fish attractors such as cedar trees may be placed in the water below them;

Family Friendly Lakes

Some bodies of water in Nebraska have been designated Family Friendly Lakes by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. These lakes are safe, comfortable and have great fish-catching potential.

The locations have a combination of:

- barrier-free fishing piers
- fishing trails
- groomed park areas
- concessions
- playgrounds
- picnic areas
- highly maintained fish populations

Read the 2010 Nebraska Fishing Guide for a list of Family Friendly Lakes denoted in the Public Fishing Areas section.

- building jetties and hard points, and surfacing them with smaller, crushed rock or concrete to stabilize and fill spaces between larger rocks to

create safer footing;

- grading shorelines to provide a relatively flat, 10- to 12-foot-wide walking surface next to deep water or fish attractors;
- building improved trails using woodchips, crushed rock and, in some cases, asphalt and pavement;
- creating primitive trails by mowing a strip of vegetation to direct foot traffic from a parking area to a shoreline’s fish-attracting features;
- making road and parking improvements;
- using vegetation barriers, which are blankets of material placed in small, shallow areas to impede growth of submerged and emergent aquatic vegetation;
- removing terrestrial vegetation along shorelines wherever feasible and appropriate; and
- leasing private property to gain access to public waters.

Jerry Kane is a public information officer in the Information and Education Division.

Walleye

Continued from Page 1

Although all predator fish will use a variety of prey, it is a good bet that a steady diet of alewives has been very important to most of the big walleyes in McConaughy. Alewives will range into shallow water, especially in the spring and early summer and after dark any time of year.

If walleyes are in the shallow, flooded cover, weedless presentations such as spinnerbaits might work well.

During mid-summer and late fall, alewife schools most likely are to be found in deeper water, and walleyes will not be far behind. In deeper water, trolling crankbaits or vertically-jigging slab spoons may be the most effective strategies, but drifting or trolling traditional live-bait rigs may also catch fish.

Consider selecting a few small- to medium-size walleyes to harvest for a meal of fresh fish while snapping some quick photos and releasing the big, fat McConaughy hogs. By practicing selective harvest those, big walleyes can be

caught again and again, and one of them might even have a chance to grow to state record proportions.

Daryl Bauer is the fisheries outreach program manager with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Read the Regs

Read the 2010 Nebraska Fishing Guide for regulations and a list of public fishing areas. The guide is available where permits are sold and at OutdoorNebraska.org.



DARYL BAUER

Large walleyes, such as the one the author bagged in the above photo, are in abundance at Lake McConaughy.

Ten Can't-Miss Events

State parks host variety of fun outtings for entire family in 2010

Great Park Pursuit

May 1-Sept. 6

Sites Across the State

Get outdoors and enjoy parks all across the state. Participants collect nature-based impressions from posts at as many as 15 parks. Their chance of winning prizes increases as they collect more impressions. The goal of the Great Park Pursuit is to encourage families to get outdoors by spending more time at parks. Park entry permit required for some parks.

Nebraska Outdoor Expo

May 15

Fort Kearny State Recreation Area

A fun day filled with a wide variety of interactive outdoor activities and demonstrations is planned for all ages and experience levels at this all-day event near Kearney. This family event will give participants the chance to experience new outdoor skills or get reacquainted with old ones. Park entry permit required.

Free Fishing and Park Entry Day

May 22

Statewide

Enjoy the day at a park or lake on the one day a year (Saturday before Memorial Day weekend) when no park entry or fishing permits are required. Get reacquainted with camping, hiking and fishing or just bring a picnic lunch and spend a lazy day outdoors. All fishing bag and length limits remain in effect.



ERIC FOWLER

Living History Events

All Summer

State Historical Parks

Take a step back in time to Nebraska's early days and see volunteers portray life on the prairie. Visitors will be educated and entertained at these events held throughout the summer in various state historical parks, ranging from military forts to a working ranch in the Sandhills. Park entry permit required.



ERIC FOWLER

Rock Creek Trail Days

June 5-6

Rock Creek Station State Historical Park

Demonstrations depicting life on the 19th century frontier and former Pony Express station will be on display at this annual event near Fairbury. Frontier survival skills will be portrayed, as well as re-enactments of the "Wild Bill" Hickok-David McCanles shooting, frontier poetry and a buffalo stew cookout. Park entry permit required.



ERIC FOWLER

Carp-O-Rama

June 26

Pawnee State Recreation Area

Bring the children out to the lake just west of Lincoln, fish for carp in an area of the lake that was pre-baited and enjoy a fresh fish lunch. Experts and biologists will be on hand to lend assistance. Participants will learn techniques for catching carp and watch a demonstration on cleaning and preparing them. Park entry permit required.



BOB GRIER

Fort Robinson Fourth of July

July 4

Fort Robinson State Park

Watch the parade in nearby Crawford in the morning, then come back to Fort Robinson to enjoy an outdoor barbeque or a buffet at the restaurant. Nebraskans love to celebrate the Fourth at state parks, so plan ahead and spend a weekend or longer camping, hiking, fishing, or enjoying the museum. Park entry permit required.

Fur Trade Days

July 9-11

Chadron State Park

Chadron celebrates its western heritage in this annual festival. Events include barbeque cook-off, costume contest, flea market, carnival, art shows, parade, music, a Fur Trade Days Raft Regatta, muzzleloader shoot, Queen of Fur Trade Days contest, World Famous Buffalo Chip Throw, and a buck skinner's camp. Some activities take place in Chadron. Park entry permit required.

Kites and Castles

July 31

Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area

This is the 21st year of the annual sand castle building/sand sculpting contest and kite flying event. The fantastic family event takes place on the lake's white sands of Martin Bay on the north shore near the dam. The day ends with a barbecue and concert. Park entry permit required.



ERIC FOWLER



BOB GRIER

Nebraska Star Party

Aug. 8-13

Merritt Reservoir SRA

You don't have to be an astronomer – or even own a telescope – to join the party. Come to this Sandhills state recreation area for a light pollution-free gaze at the summer night sky. Enjoy camping, fishing, boating, and swimming during the day and

the annual Nebraska Star Party at night. Park entry permit required.

2010 Nebraska State Park Schedule

Parks Key
SP: State Park
SRA: State Recreation Area
SHP: State Historical Park

Alexandria Lakes SRA
Alexandria, (402) 729-5777

Scenic area includes excellent fishing and modern campground. Kids’ Fishing Clinic, May 22.

Arbor Lodge SHP
Nebraska City, (402) 873-7222

Home of J. Sterling Morton, founder of Arbor Day, features 52-room mansion with period furnishings, carriage house and arboretum. Mansion is open April 30-Oct. 17, 1-5 p.m.; April 30-May 2: Arbor Day, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; Applejack Festival, fine arts show, Sept. 18-19; Living History Sundays, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Sept. 26, Oct. 3, Oct. 10, and Oct. 17.

Bowring Sandhills Ranch SHP
Merriman, (308) 684-3428

Working Sandhills ranch interprets early ranching. Interpretive center, historical displays and demonstrations. Ranch home tours and visitor center is open May 29-Sept. 6, Monday-Saturday (closed Wednesdays), 10 a.m.-4 p.m. and Sundays, noon-4 p.m.; Sod House Sunday, June 27.

Ashfall Fossil Beds SHP
Royal, (402) 893-2000

Huge bone bed of animals fossilized in volcanic ash. Interpretive center and ongoing excavation of fossils. Open daily Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend. Call for additional open days.

Ash Hollow SHP
Lewellen, (308) 778-5651

Rest stop for wagon trains along Oregon Trail. Interpretive center, archaeological site and wagon ruts. Visitor center open May 29-Sept. 6, Thursday-Sunday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Closed Monday-Wednesday. Park grounds open 8 a.m.-sunset year-round. Ash Hollow pageant, June 18-19.

Buffalo Bill Ranch SHP
North Platte, (308) 535-8035

Home and barn built by frontier showman and scout William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody. Memorabilia and historical displays. House and barn open March 22-May 28, Mon.-Fri., 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; May 29-Sept. 6, open seven days a week, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sept. 7-Oct. 22, Mon.-Fri., 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Calamus SRA
Burwell, (308) 346-5666

Nebraska’s newest large reservoir has fish hatchery nearby. Calamus Carp Tournament, June 5; Catfish Tournament, July 17-18; Calamus Carp Tournament, Aug. 7; Catfish Tournament, Sept. 11-12; Nebraska Junk Jaunt, Sept. 24-26.

Chadron SP
Chadron, (308) 432-6167

Nebraska’s first state park is

located in the scenic Pine Ridge. Housekeeping cabins available mid-April to mid-November, plus a group camp/conference facility. Modern campground with showers available. Chadron Adventure Race, May 22; Chadron SP Anniversary Day, June 19; Fur Trade Days, July 9-11.

Eugene T. Mahoney SP
Ashland, (402) 944-2523

Modern park located in bluffs above Platte River. Year-round lodging and recreation. Restaurant open year-round. Holiday buffets: Easter, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. Star gazing dates TBA. Moonshell Storytelling Festival, Sept. 11.

Fort Atkinson SHP
Fort Calhoun, (402) 468-5611

First military post west of the Missouri River. Interpretive center, reconstructed stockade, outbuildings. Visitor center is open weekends only, 11 a.m.-4:30 p.m., May 1-23 and Sept. 11-Oct. 17; open daily, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., May 29-Sept. 6. Living history demonstrations, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., May 1-2, June 5-6, July 3-4, Aug. 7-8, Sept. 4-5, and Oct. 2-3.

Fort Hartsuff SHP
Burwell, (308) 346-4715

Restored plains infantry post, interpretive center. Office and gift shop open 10 a.m.-5 p.m., May 29-Sept. 6, Saturdays and Sundays only or by appointment.

Fort Kearny SHP and SRA
Kearney, (308) 865-5305

Oregon Trail military post. Interpretive center, reconstructed stockade and buildings, living history. Crane Information Center is open daily Feb. 26-March 28, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., and by appointment only or at superintendent’s discretion from March 29-May 16; park is open daily May 17-Sept. 6, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Nebraska Outdoor Expo, May 15; 1860s soldier and civilian encampment and living history demonstrations, May 29-31 and Sept. 4-6; Pony Express Re-ride, June 20; Fourth of July Stampede Days, July 3-4.

Fort Robinson SP
Crawford, (308) 665-2900

Historical outpost served from Indian Wars through World War II. Museums, restored buildings, modern and primitive camping, cabin and lodging facilities available mid-April to mid-November. Restaurant is open daily from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend. Fire school, April 10-11 and April 17-18; Boy Scout Tree Plant, March 26-28; park opens at 4 p.m., May 28; official opening of all park activities, May 29; Intertribal Gathering, June 11-13; Art Show, July 2-4; Fort Robinson 4th of July Celebration, July 4; APHA

Trail Ride, Sept. 6-11; AHA Trail Ride, Sept. 15-19.

Fremont Lakes SRA
Fremont, (402) 727-3290

Eastern Nebraska favorite includes 270 water acres in 20 sandpit lakes. Kids’ Fishing Day, 9 a.m.-noon, May 22.

Indian Cave SP
Shubert, (402) 883-2575

Restored schoolhouse and general store from the old Missouri River town of St. Deroin. Located in scenic Missouri River bluffs on the Lewis and Clark Trail. Modern and primitive camping available. Living history demonstrations. Black powder demonstrations, May 29-31, June 5-6, July 3-4, Aug. 7-8, and Sept. 4-6. Fireworks, Sept. 4.

Lake McConaughy SRA
Ogallala, (308) 284-8800

Nebraska’s largest reservoir, with 100 miles of shoreline, white-sand beaches, modern and primitive camping. Catfish tournament, May 1; Colorado Walleye Association Tournament, May 1-2; walleye tournament, May 15; Big Mac Shut Up and Fish Walleye Tournament, May 22-23; Go Fish Kids Fishing Clinic and Water Expo, June 5; Nebraska Walleye Association Tournament, June 20-21; Kites and Castles, July 31.

Merritt Reservoir SRA
Valentine, (402) 376-3320

This Sandhills lake is one of the state’s finest bodies of water for fishing. Nebraska Walleye Trail, June 6-27, with championship on June 26-27; Nebraska Walleye Association Tournament, July 19-20 and Oct. 2-3. Carp Tournament, May 29-30; Catfish tournament dates TBA; Nebraska Star Party, Aug. 8-13.

Niobrara SP
Niobrara, (402) 857-3373

Located at confluence of the Niobrara and Missouri rivers on the Lewis and Clark Trail. Modern and primitive camping available. Modern housekeeping cabins overlooking the river with year-round availability. Horse trail rides, May 29-Sept. 5; swimming pool is open daily, June 5-Aug. 8, on weekends only, Aug. 9-Sept. 5; buffalo cookout and entertainment every Saturday, May 29-Sept. 4; Nebraska Humanities Programs, May 29, July 3, July 24, and Sept. 4; National Park Service Programs, June 12, June 19, June 26, July 31, Aug. 14, and Aug. 21; Kids Program presented by National Parks Service, July 2; Birding Program by Mark Brogie, July 17; Becoming an Outdoors-Woman kayak workshop, July 23-24; Ponca Cultural Night, Aug. 7.

Pawnee SRA
Emerald, (402) 796-2362

Free Fishing and Park Entry Day
Free Fishing and Park Entry Day in Nebraska is May 22, when anyone may fish in Nebraska or enter a state park without a permit. All bag and length limits still are in effect.

This Salt Valley Lake just west of Lincoln offers camping and fishing, along with miles of trails. Carp-O-Rama, 8 a.m.-1 p.m., June 26.

Platte River SP
Louisville, (402) 234-2217

Located in wooded hills above the Platte River. Modern housekeeping cabins available for year-round lodging. Tepees and camper cabins also available. Fishing clinic, 9-11:30 a.m., May 22; horseback trail rides, swimming pool, craft center, paddle boat rentals available, May 29-Sept. 6; Father’s Day buffet, June 20; holiday buffets, May 29-31, July 4 and Sept. 6.

Ponca SP
Ponca, (402) 755-2284

Located in scenic bluffs above Missouri River on the Lewis and Clark Trail. Modern and primitive camping available. Housekeeping cabins available May-October. Outdoor education programs are available Memorial Day-Labor Day. Mother’s Day buffet, May 9; Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshop, May 21-23; Father’s Day Fossil Hunt, June 19-20; Father’s Day Fish Fry, June 20; Becoming an Outdoors-Family Workshop, June 11-13; Heritage Farm Weekend; Oct. 1-3; Archery Sight-In, Sept. 11-12; Missouri River Outdoor Expo, Sept. 18-19.

Rock Creek Station SHP
Fairbury, (402) 729-5777

See wagon ruts along the old Oregon-California Trail in this history-rich park. Rock Creek Trail Days, June 5-6.

Two Rivers SRA
Waterloo, (402) 359-5165

Fishing and swimming at several sandpit lakes as well as Platte River. Caboose cabins available May 1-Sept. 30.

Victoria Springs SRA
Anselmo, (308) 749-2235

Secluded, scenic getaway in the Sandhills. Two cabins near the park’s pond and modern camping available. Kids’ Fishing Day, May 22; Very Important Kids’ Day, June 5.

Wildcat Hills SRA
Gering, (308) 436-3777

This Panhandle jewel is situated among rugged buttes and pine-covered canyons. July-August: summer day camps at nature center.

Willow Creek SRA
Pierce, (402) 329-4053

Camping, boating, fishing, and biking are among the activities to enjoy. Fish and Chips Fishing/Golf Tournament, June 12-13.

Permit Required
A park entry permit is required for all vehicles entering state parks, state recreation areas and state historical parks. Permits, including fishing permits, may be purchased at OutdoorNebraska.org.

Raptors illegally shot each year

By Sonya Steckler

As our national bird, the bald eagle is a majestic symbol of the American wilderness. The sight of eagles congregating along a Nebraska river in winter, or a pair tending a nest, evokes a sense of wonder and respect.

Yet bald eagles have faced many challenges to their survival, including pesticide poisoning and habitat loss. This resulted in their listing as a federally and state endangered species in the late 1970s. Conservation efforts over the past four decades have brought eagles back from the brink of extinction, resulting in their removal from the Endangered Species List in 2007.

Nonetheless, eagles and other birds of prey, known as raptors, still face many threats. Surprisingly, one of the greatest threats is deliberate shooting. Already this year, wildlife rehabilitation centers such as Raptor Recovery Nebraska Inc. have received raptor shooting victims.

According to Denise Lewis, outreach coordinator for Raptor Recovery, 24 birds were brought to the center with gunshot wounds in 2009. These birds included eagles, hawks and owls. Only 10 percent of these birds were able to be released back into the wild. Most of the remaining birds died or had to be euthanized. Across the United States, thousands of raptors are killed annually as a result of shooting; most of these incidents remain unknown or unreported.

Raptors often are persecuted due to the misconception that they prey mostly on game birds and animals, which are valued for hunting. In fact, raptors feed on insects and nongame species. For example, red-tailed hawks prey primarily on small mammals such as voles, mice and rabbits. Bald eagles eat mostly fish and carrion.

Raptors often are the top predators in natural areas, and as such, they play an important role in Nebraska’s ecosystems. Because they often prey on

small mammals, raptors help to maintain healthy levels of these potential nuisance animals, which can cause disease and crop damage. A healthy raptor population is an indicator of a well-functioning ecosystem.

Shooting raptors is illegal under federal and Nebraska law and may result in heavy fines and jail time. Raptors are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which imposes fines of up to \$15,000 and six months in jail for shooting or in any way harming these birds.

The Nebraska Wildlife Crimestoppers program, sponsored by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Nebraska Wildlife Protectors Association, offers rewards for information leading to arrests for game law violations. To report a raptor shooting, contact Crimestoppers at (800) 742-7627.

Sonya Steckler is a nongame bird biologist with the Wildlife Division.

Low-cost youth turkey permits now available

By Jerry Kane

In an effort to attract more young hunters, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission this year created a \$5 youth turkey permit for those hunters under age 16.

Youth have had their own spring turkey season, but before 2010, they also paid the same fee as an adult for a turkey permit – \$23 (residents). The \$5 youth fee is the same for nonresident youth permits, while a regular nonresident turkey permit is \$90.

The 2010 spring turkey seasons are: archery and youth archery seasons, March 25-May 31; youth shotgun season, April 10-May 31; and shotgun season, April 17-May 31.

In the past, a hunter would need an archery turkey permit to hunt during the archery season. Starting in 2010, individuals hunting under the authority of a turkey permit may take turkeys with archery equipment during the archery season and with shotguns in the shotgun season. Hunters may have as many as three spring turkey permits.

Other changes for turkey hunting in 2010 include the removal of draw weight restrictions on archery equipment and the loosening of landowner permit eligibility requirements. Read the 2010 Nebraska Spring and Fall Turkey brochure for more information.

Jerry Kane is a public information officer in the Information and Education Division.

Drawdowns

Continued from Page 1

said some fish likely were flushed down the canal when Lake Maloney was drained. Eichner also was concerned ice and snow cover could lead to winter kill on the remaining fish, but tests in February showed oxygen levels were “surprisingly good,” though they planned to look for evidence of a winter kill at ice out.

While the full effect of the drawdown on the fish population won’t be known until biologists sample the reservoir this fall, walleye and wiper fingerlings will be stocked into the reservoir this spring.

“The good news is there is quite a large number of fish that come down through the canal system, especially from Sutherland Reservoir,” Eichner said, adding that those fish will provide angling opportunities until stocked fish reach keeper size.

Lake Maloney was built in the 1930s and is owned and maintained by the Nebraska Public Power District. Located on the Sutherland Supply Canal, the 1,600-acre lake serves as a regulating reservoir for the North Platte Hydroelectric Plant and downstream irrigation projects.

Red Willow Reservoir was lowered after maintenance workers discovered a small hole in the dam in October. Further inspection revealed four tension cracks that have been traced to settling in the dam’s embankment, the foundation on which it was built, said Marv Swanda,

manager of the McCook office of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which operates the dam.

To allow for inspection, and for the safety of all living downstream along Red Willow Creek and in communities below its confluence with the Republican River, the lake was lowered 20 feet in November and December. That left the reservoir’s capacity at 17 percent and surface acres at 36 percent of normal.

The dam was built on Red Willow Creek in 1962 for flood control and to supply the Frenchman-Cambridge Irrigation District. Like many Nebraska reservoirs, it had experienced a significant, prolonged drawdown during the drought of the past decade, falling 22 feet below normal in 2002. The lake had nearly made a full recovery in recent years and may have filled for the first time since 1997 this year. Irrigators, who have gotten little, if any, water in recent years, will go without in the years to come.

Swanda said a study is underway to identify the best remedy to the issue. The earliest repairs could begin would be the summer of 2011.

“We’ve got a lot of dams across the West and have had some experience with a couple of others along these lines, so they have some potential fixes in mind,” he said.

About 69,000 campers, boaters and anglers visited Red Willow State Recreation Area in 2009. It is known for its trophy wiper fishing, but also holds walleye, white bass, catfish, crappie, northern pike, and smallmouth and largemouth bass.

Eichner said some fish were flushed out of the reservoir when it was lowered, but with depths of 25 feet or more remaining, there still is plenty of water for those that remain. Fall sampling will determine the short-term management strategy biologists will use.

Declining inflows may result in the reservoir taking several years to fill once the dam is repaired. But Eichner said the trees and other vegetation that grow on the exposed lakebed will create excellent fish habitat when the lake fills, and biologists are also discussing the possibility of placing large cedar trees removed from the uplands around the lake on the lakebed to create fish attractors.

“Once we have water back into Willow and have flooded vegetation, our stocking approach will become broader in terms of crappie, bluegill and largemouth bass,” he said. “I think that down the road, Red Willow could be a very, very, good fishery.”

The Commission and Bureau plan to extend the boat ramp on the south shore of Red Willow to ensure boat access to the lake this summer. Campgrounds remain open at the park.

While the drawdowns aren’t the best for a fishery, wise anglers have already made the most of the opportunity to inspect the lake bottoms, giving them a much better picture of what they are seeing on their fish finders.

Eric Fowler is a regional editor for NEBRASKAland Magazine.

Morels

Continued from Page 1

- bloom, get out into the field.
- River bottoms, then hills. Morels appear first in moist wooded river bottoms, then later (around Mother’s Day) in hilly, forested areas.
- Dead/Dying/Fallen trees. Morels don’t follow rules, and may be found just about anywhere, but around dead, dying and fallen trees are optimal places to begin your search.

Here are some key things to remember before embarking on your hunt:

- Get landowner permission. Most landowners will grant permission for shed and morel hunting, especially if you offer to share some of your bounty.
- Never go alone; always go with a partner and be sure to wear blaze orange to be seen.
- Use a plastic bucket with air holes in it to carry your antlers and mushrooms. The bucket’s sides will protect you from antlers in case of a fall and protect your morels from being damaged as you hike through the woods. The holes will allow moisture to drain and keep the mushrooms from getting soggy.
- Having a sturdy walking stick along is helpful

for leaning on when bending to pick up an antler or mushroom or moving vegetation to find those that are hidden.

Also, don’t forget to bring children along. They are lower to the ground and may spot sheds and morels more easily than adults Shed and morel hunts are excellent ways to introduce children to nature. Both hunts provide fresh air and physical exercise along with the challenge and excitement of identifying game trails, plants and animals.

Katie Stacey is an office clerk and Greg Wagner a public information officer for the Information and Education Division in the Commission’s Omaha office.



A lone canoeist drags his craft onto an Elkhorn River sandbar in Dodge County.

Upgrades boost access on lower Elkhorn River

By Pat Engelhard

The re-opening of the Elkhorn Crossing Recreation Area in the fall of 2009 offers outdoor enthusiasts and canoeists a much improved river access point. Elkhorn Crossing is located just east of the intersection of 252nd Street and Bennington Road in Douglas County. The area, which has no park or camping fees, now has spacious renovated amenities. Features include a boat ramp, improved camping facilities, new RV pads, a playground, and new restrooms. There is sufficient room for larger groups, making it perfect for families and youth groups. The meandering and scenic Elkhorn River lures Nebraskans and tourists alike to its banks. An added appeal of Elkhorn Crossing, which is managed by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, is its close proximity to Omaha. The area, as well as downstream access points at West Maple and West Dodge roads, makes for excellent stopping points on the Elkhorn, or stopover points for paddlers headed downstream to the lower Platte River. With these areas on the lower Elkhorn, river recreation enthusiasts may choose to spend their time leisurely floating the Elkhorn while being provided adequate vehicle parking, camping facilities and easy access to and from their planned activities for the day, week or as part of a several-day excursion. Multiple access points along the river means water trail fans can choose more

options when planning their trips down the river. Also, those who enjoy Nebraska’s rivers from one of the many access points further upstream, as part of a longer planned excursion, have the convenience of putting up for the night close to the state’s largest city, as well as accessibility to small towns along their way. Upstream to Norfolk from Elkhorn Crossing are 10 access points. Six of those areas offer camping, including Wood Duck Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and Dead Timber State Recreation Area (SRA). Water trails enthusiasts also may link up with the Platte River. They may travel 32 miles from Elkhorn Crossing to Schramm Park SRA on the north side of the Platte, or another 5 miles down to Louisville SRA, on the south side, where modern and primitive camping is available, in addition to great fishing. For more details on the Elkhorn access points and river miles, download the Commission’s Elkhorn River Water Trails Guide at ngpc.state.ne.us/boating/guides/CanoeTrails/ElkhornRiver.pdf. Planning is a critical part of a successful canoe trip. A list of private outfitters is available at: ngpc.state.ne.us/boating/guides/canoetrails/canoetrails.pdf. Additional resources are available at: ngpc.state.ne.us/boating/guides/canoetrails/. Pat Engelhard is a web content producer in the Information and Education Division.

Additional twists added to Great Park Pursuit

By Tim Montgomery

Kicking off its third season on May 1, the Great Park Pursuit will return with more family fun and outdoor adventure. This year’s program will challenge teams to visit 15 parks throughout Nebraska. At each site, participants follow clues to collect nature-based impressions from posts hidden in the park. Entry into prize drawings are based on the number of impressions collected. Sharing a common goal to promote the use of parks as a sensible and inexpensive way to stay healthy, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and Nebraska Recreation and Park Association partnered to launch the program in 2008. Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services returns as the program’s title sponsor, to help encourage active lifestyles while increasing awareness of Nebraska’s nature-rich outdoor recreation opportunities. Outdoor Recreation Products’ third year of program sponsorship will provide close-to-home opportunities for participants. This year’s program will highlight the relationship between physical activity, access to quality open space, and healthy Nebraskans. To promote the relationship, posts will be located between a half-mile and 1 mile out on accessible trail systems at park sites. This distance allows participants to achieve their 30 minutes of daily physical activity as recommended for adults by the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. A second change to this year’s program will be the inclusion of long-distance posts at three selected sites. These posts will be located at further distances in the park. Participants may select the normal post at each of these three sites or choose the longer distance bonus posts. Additional prize drawings will be held for teams reaching bonus posts. The Great Park Pursuit program and registration are free. Participants only need to pay for postage when mailing in nature impressions and entry into some of the park sites. Teams may be made up of families, friends, coworkers, youth organizations, or any other group of individuals. To register, visit negpp.org, call (402) 471-5424 or write to Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, ATTN: Tim Montgomery, 2200 N. 33rd Street, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503. Tim Montgomery is the federal aid administrator in the Parks Division.

2010 Participating GPP Parks	
Branched Oak SRA	David City Park – David City
Johnson Park – Fremont	Zorinsky Lake – Omaha
Willow Creek SRA	Niobrara State Park
Cowboy Trail near Long Pine	Riverside Park – Scottsbluff
Legion Park – Sidney	Lake Ogallala SRA
Lake Helen Park – Gothenburg	Fort Kearny SRA
Bussell Park – Ord	Streeter Park – Aurora
Rock Creek Station SRA	

Fort Kearny Expo offers chance to learn outdoor skills

By Julia Plugge

Nebraska provides the ideal environment for people who enjoy the outdoors. Spring to summer, fall to winter, there are a variety of outdoor activities your family can experience. The Nebraska Outdoor Expo will showcase the state’s vast number of fun activities for outdoor enthusiasts of all ages. The fourth annual Nebraska Outdoor Expo, set for May 13-15 at Fort Kearny State Recreation Area (SRA), will have a variety of hands-on activities, demonstrations and interactive displays encouraging outdoor recreation. The first two days of the expo are specifically for students in grades 4 through 6. The expo will be open to the public on May 15 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The expo is designed to meet the needs of anyone interested in outdoor lifestyles, regardless of age or experience, including anglers, hunters, boaters,

Nebraska Outdoor Expo
May 13-15, Fort Kearny State Recreation Area

campers, and wildlife viewers. Fort Kearny’s 160 acres will be packed with recreational activities. The venue’s eight lakes will offer on-the-water experiences for anyone interested in kayaking, boating, fishing, and hunting dog demonstrations. New attractions in 2010 include nationally known hunting experts, hands-on bow fishing, children’s Discovery Zone, and a Marketplace showcasing outdoor-related vendors and exhibitors. Expo participants will have the chance to:

- view fish at the touch tank
- shoot targets at the shotgun and air rifle range
- test their archery skills

- attend hunting and fishing seminars
- kayak across a lake
- visit with commercial vendors, sportsmen’s organizations, conservation groups, shooting clubs, and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission staffers

The expo is free, although a park entry permit is required for all vehicles entering the park. During the Outdoor Classroom portion of the expo, May 13-14, students will participate in fun, interactive programs to enhance their knowledge and ethical understanding of wildlife and the outdoors. Outdoor Classrooms also will be held for all students May 4-5 in Scottsbluff and April 21-22 for Platte River State Park. Julia Plugge is the event coordinator in the Information and Education Division.



SCOTT EVELAND

The author, left, while working Lake McConaughy chats with the driver of a personal watercraft.

Safety essential to ensure boating fun this summer

Remain sober, use life jackets, stay wary on water

By Scott Eveland

Soon people will be heading out on the water in boats to enjoy fishing, water sports, or just cruising across their favorite waterway. While boating is a safe activity, it does have its risks.

The Boating Safety Section of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission wants to remind people of ways to reduce the risk and help ensure a safe and enjoyable time on the water.

First, avoid alcohol. The dangers of drinking and driving a motor vehicle on land are well known, yet some people do not translate that danger to the operation of a motorized boat. However, the danger is actually intensified as boat operators can become impaired with less alcohol due to heat and dehydration. Driving a motorboat requires just as much concentration as a car — if not more.

Alcohol contributes to about half of the boating fatalities each year, plus many other injury and noninjury accidents. Boating Under the Influence is a criminal violation on the same level as Driving Under the Influence in a car and is enforced in Nebraska.

The use of life jackets is another

live-saver on the water. Most fatalities involve a person falling from or being ejected from a boat. While a life jacket is required to be readily accessible for most in a boat, there usually is no warning before it is needed. Children under age 13 and anybody on a personal watercraft are required by law to wear a United States Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device. People being towed by a boat on skis, a tube, or other similar device also must wear a life jacket.

Boaters should ensure that their boat contains all the required safety equipment in order to be prepared if an emergency does occur. Life jackets, throw cushions, fire extinguishers and bailing devices are required on most boats. For a comprehensive list of what is required on a boat, check out the 2010 Nebraska Boating Guide at OutdoorNebraska.org/boating.

When operating a boat, be sure to keep a sharp lookout. Many boat collisions occur because people don't keep an eye on what is going on around them, or boats get too close to each other when going too fast. The best boat operators are looking around for other boats, swimmers, stumps and other hazards. This is especially true for operators of

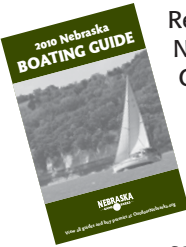
personal watercraft or other high-speed vessels. Speeds in excess of 5 mph are prohibited if within 30 yards of any other vessel, swimming area or dock.

Boaters are encouraged to take a boating safety course. Motorboat operators must be at least 14 years of age to operate, a boat and those under 18 must complete a boating safety course and have a course completion card in their possession. Adults also should take a course and often may earn an insurance discount for completing one. Visit OutdoorNebraska.org/boating to find a class. Boaters who have completed a course are less likely to be involved in a boat accident.

Scott Eveland is a boating safety officer with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. He works Lake McConaughy and western Nebraska.

Read the Regs

Read the 2010 Nebraska Boating Guide for regulations and a list of boating waters, available where permits are sold and at OutdoorNebraska.org/boating.



Rules for Staying Safe

Have a fun, safe summer on and in the water by heeding the following tips and rules:

Boating

- Don't drink alcohol
- Wear a life jacket
- Have all required safety equipment
- Be wary of surroundings
- Take a boating safety course

Water-Skiing and Personal Watercraft

- A vessel pulling a skier must have an observer on board or a wide-angle mirror.
- It is unlawful for a boat operator to pull a skier who is not wearing a life jacket.
- Skiing is legal from a half-hour before sunrise until a half-hour after sunset.
- An operator of boat towing a skier must be at least 16 years old.
- Personal watercraft may be operated legally from sunrise to sunset.
- Operators of personal watercraft must wear a lanyard-type engine cut-off switch.
- All persons onboard a personal watercraft must wear a life jacket.

Swimming

- Swimming beaches are marked by signs and include lines of buoys set in 5½ to 6 feet of water.
- It is unlawful to swim within 20 yards of a boat dock.
- Use only U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices (PFDs).
- Parents should closely watch their children, especially toddlers.
- Take rest breaks to avoid becoming exhausted.
- Leave the water when thunderstorms approach.

Parks with Pools

Many state recreation areas have unsupervised swimming beaches. The following state parks have supervised swimming pools:

- Eugene T. Mahoney
- Ponca
- Chadron
- Fort Robinson
- Niobrara
- Platte River

Boating Etiquette Tips

- Ready your boat before you get to the ramp so others at the ramp won't have to wait long.
- On the ramp, back the boat in and have the driver pull it away while the truck is being parked.
- Be patient when launching. If you're unfamiliar with the ramp, watch a couple other boat launches before you back in.
- Practice your trailer technique away from the ramp to ensure you don't waste time and hold up other boaters on the ramp.
- Observe posted no-wake zones. Enter the dock area at a slow speed.
- If you see another boater in distress, come to his aid.
- If you are a guest on a boat, offer to pay for the fuel or buy lunch for the boat owner. Offer to help but wait for instructions.
- Be mindful of boaters that are fishing. Know where their lines are in the water.
- Unload gear from the boat and wipe it down after it is pulled from the ramp.